

Release: October 1, 2001

Contact:

Alan Anderson, Project Leader 815/273-2732

Alan_G_Anderson@fws.gov

Chuck Traxler, External Affairs 612/713-5313

Charles_Traxler@fws.gov

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSES OPTIONS FOR NEW NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE AT FORMER SAVANNA ARMY DEPOT

Public comments sought on Draft Environmental Assessment

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is seeking public comments on a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed establishment of a new national wildlife refuge on portions of the 13,062 acre former Savanna Army Depot located along the Mississippi River near Savanna, Ill. Written comments on the Draft EA will be accepted through Oct. 31, 2001.

If established, the area would be renamed Lost Mounds National Wildlife Refuge, become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System and provide habitat for many species of migratory birds and resident wildlife. The proposal area includes over 5,000 acres of forested backwaters with sloughs, lakes and flowing side-channels which provide habitat for a diversity of fish, shellfish, wildlife and plants. An additional 4,000 acres of sand prairie/savanna habitat would sustain unique plant communities and 47 State-threatened and endangered species.

National wildlife refuge's are public land and public involvement in the establishment and management of these lands is critical. The Service is asking all interested citizens to review the Draft EA and provide comments on the proposed plans. The 9111-acre proposed refuge is also being reviewed under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This area has not been systematically investigated for the presence of cultural resources, although the Army has identified four prehistoric archeological sites and 43 historic sites on the Depot. The public is requested to inform the Service about archeological sites, buildings and structures, historic places, cemeteries, and traditional use sites that could influence decisions about management of the new Refuge.

Copies of the Draft EA are available at the Savanna District headquarters of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (Phone: 815/273-2732) located at 7071 Riverview Road, Thomson, Ill. Copies are available for onsite review at public libraries in Hanover and Savanna, Illinois. The document is also available on the Internet at <http://midwest.fws.gov/planning/>. Written comments on the Draft EA will be accepted through Oct. 31, 2001. Please send comments to Alan Anderson at the address above or submit them through the Internet site.

Three alternatives are presented in the Draft EA, including a “No Action” alternative. A common theme of the alternatives includes refuge establishment and a varying extent of public use. The following briefly describes each alternative:

Alternative A. No Action. The Lost Mound Refuge would not be established under the no action alternative. The Army would retain land and re-appropriate as necessary to remove land from its property inventory.

Alternative B. Refuge Establishment / No Public Use. The Service would establish the 9,111 acre Lost Mound Refuge but no public access would be allowed due to safety concerns and possible damage to sensitive upland habitats. The refuge would not be open to the general public except in cases of emergency wildlife management actions. The area would be managed solely as a protected wildlife sanctuary with access only for refuge administration.

Alternative C. Refuge Establishment / Limited Public Access (Preferred Alternative)
The preferred alternative would establish the Lost Mound Refuge and allow for limited public access. Placing limits on public access will give refuge staff the opportunity to manage threatened and endangered species and critical migratory bird habitat while still providing the public with safe, wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities.

The Draft EA also contains an Interim Comprehensive Conservation Plan that will outline how the refuge will be managed until detailed plans can be completed in the next few years. Public involvement will be critical during the development of all management plans.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 530 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.